

The Honorable Lourdes A. Leon Guerrero
Maga'hågan Guahån
SPECIAL ADDRESS
October 2, 2019 "Public Safety"

Håfa Adai!

Like newly elected governors and lieutenant governors from around the country, Josh and I came to office facing a tidal wave of crime. Our streets felt more violent, drug related crime was on the rise, and, as usual, we were left with too few tools to do the job.

But we did not despair.

We worked with Democrats in the Guam Legislature to pass a budget that will put 30 more police officers on the street, fund the first drug detoxification unit in years, and secure more funds for youth mental health first aid. We won a federal grant to place detection dogs at our port and fix the X-ray that identifies drug shipments hidden in commercial containers.

But, none of our progress in public safety—none of it matters—if we do not trust those who are sworn to serve and protect.

Let me be clear: the vast majority of law enforcement officers in this community are good people. We appreciate and respect that they run toward the danger—not away from it; that they so often place the safety of our families above time with their own.

But, recent events force us to confront hard, uncomfortable truths, that a few of those charged with enforcing the law may in fact be breaking it. And while everyone is entitled to his or her day in court, we have to acknowledge that we have been here too many times before. We have seen those we entrust with power corrupt our communities with drugs, exploit women, and rob us of the faith we place in each other. And slowly, when things don't change, trust turns to fear and fear becomes frustration.

I understand these feelings because I feel them too. I know that we wonder if our problems are unique to Guam—if something is broken with law enforcement here that isn't broken anywhere else.

Yet, we are not alone. From New York City, to Philadelphia, Killeen, Texas to Honolulu, communities across the nation are dealing with small elements of law enforcement that cross the line and abuse their power. Acknowledging this national reality isn't about dismissing our local problems; it is about understanding them. We are a part of a national struggle to restore faith in law enforcement.

And yet, we must also acknowledge that our challenges are made on Guam and only Guam has the power to meet them.

It also means that we must remember the hundreds of men and women who work in Guam's law enforcement community with honesty, integrity, and heart. They didn't choose to enforce the law because they like long shifts away from their families. They aren't protecting our businesses or villages to get their names in the paper—or because their line of work will make them rich. They do it because they are a part of something larger than themselves.

And I will not allow all their work, suffering, and sacrifice to be betrayed by those few who dishonor their profession.

For this reason, I am asking the Attorney General of Guam to exercise his existing authority to receive confidential public complaints, to independently investigate, and prosecute abuses of power—in any agency or branch of government.

If any impediments of law exist, I ask that the Legislature remove them with all due haste. If additional resources must be found, our branches must come together and find them.

Additionally, I ask that the Legislature work with me and fix the Guam Community Police Review Commission, which has remained dormant and ineffective despite it being reconstituted year ago. While its mandate is laudable, its purview must be expanded beyond the confines of GPD. And the legislature must recognize that no commission can receive complaints, make findings of fact, recommend disciplinary actions, or suggest legislative changes without meaningful support and clear guidance from our lawmakers.

Finally, I will require that any person permanently appointed to lead a law enforcement agency, or become its deputy, will be subject to the same polygraph and psychological evaluation as a director of the same agency—whether they are subject to legislative confirmation or not.

Everyday, the men and women of our law enforcement agencies put on their uniforms, strap on their boots, and work to keep us safe. To them we owe our deepest gratitude.

These policies are not meant to persecute those who faithfully enforce the law; they are meant to punish the lawless.

Now, I am not naive enough to believe that any set of policies can prevent corruption or stop the abuse of power 100% of the time. But I do believe that this is a place to start.

As was said long ago: “It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.”

We will try not because it is easy but because it is hard. While others point fingers, we will point the way forward. That is the Guam I believe in. That is the Guam we owe to each other. That is the Guam we must leave to our children.